

Limbikani

(A pink day mask from the Dedza area)



Themes

- 1) Abuse of power
- 2) Opposing Kamuzu Banda (supporting political change)
- 3) Recent politics

Etymology

Limbikani means, 'Keep on striving,' or 'Do not lose heart.'

Description

Limbikani was introduced to *gule* at the end of 1992, when the country was preparing for major changes on the political scene. Soon after the March 1992 publication of the Lenten Pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops, Malawi started moving toward a multiparty system and democracy. The one-party state of Kamuzu Banda that had ruled for 30 years was now being threatened. Frequent political rallies were seeking support for the old Malawi Congress Party (MCP) or to promote the new parties that had formed. **Limbikani** was one of the characters that supported the effort of the new parties and discouraged the continuation of the MCP and the ruling government.

The mask of **Limbikani** (35 cm.) is red or pink, to portray a person whose behaviour is antisocial and promotes individualism, selfishness and witchcraft. The face is that of an old man who is bald, wrinkled and toothless. A crown of hair surrounds his bald head, and he bears thick eyebrows, a smart goatee and a long moustache. Two 35 centimetre long horns protrude horizontally from his head, but they appear to be about to drop off. A black sisal hair lock stands on his forehead, contrasting with the drooping horns. This contrast suggests that, despite some appearances of

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Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mua Parish, P. O. Box 41, Mtakatika, Malawi

strength, the old man's power and popularity is diminishing. The mask's attachment is made of an assortment of domestic and wild animal skins, to mark that his standing is equivocal. **Limbikani** wears a spotless white shirt and a pair of smart black trousers. He holds a sceptre-like walking stick and a flywhisk. These details emphasise that he is a person of high status and a ruler of the land.

Limbikani enters the *bwalo* with his insignia, and the women congregate around him. He shows signs of decrepitude and walks with difficulty. Once the drums have reached their climax, he begins to swerve his feet and flap his flywhisk with great energy, as though his appearance in public has revived him. The male choir comments, *"What is happening here is the concern of all of us. You there, keep on striving (do not lose heart)! The chief tries to attract (more) people. Keep on striving! Keep on striving by telling the people sweet words to make them forget their home! Limbikani (Mr. Keep on striving) is the one says all these (nice) words, my friends. In my opinion, Limbikani (Mr. Keep on striving), things can easily go wrong, Mr. Keep on striving, Mr. Do not lose heart!"* The song starts by quoting the well known Chewa proverb: *"What is happening here is the concern of all of us."* The proverb invites the audience to be united and responsible. The song continues by telling the story of a hypothetical chief who hypnotises his people with flattery and empty promises, while they remain oppressed and suffer under his tyranny. They live in poverty and misery. The song ends with a personal comment, warning this hypothetical chief that his reign is soon coming to an end. The chief referred to in the song is obviously Kamuzu Banda, who began to hold multiple political rallies in an attempt to regain his lost popularity. The song criticises chiefs and particularly heads of state by pointing out that it is wrong to rule by force and to treat people harshly. A reign of tyranny will eventually fail. People will overthrow the one who made them suffer. In the events of 1992, Malawians saw a sign of hope and the beginning of the process of liberation. They had failed to change Kamuzu Banda's tyrannical attitude. Now they could predict his downfall and voice a hope for a new leader who would not rule them with the whip.

Song

*"Zidze pano za tonse, za tonse tate e! **Limbikani** inu! Amfumu akopa anthu, **Limbikani! Limbikani** tate kuuza anthu mau abwino kuti aiwale kwawo! A **Limbikani** ndiye anena zonsezi, anzanganu. Kwa ine ndekha tate de **Limbikani, Limbikani**, zingachitike mwachabe tate ye **Limbikani, Limbikani!**"*

Source

Interview in 1993